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SUBJECT: NIGER: MINISTER OF FINANCE HOLDS MEETING OF DONOR  
PARTNERS; DONORS' MONTHLY BREAKFAST

MOF Meeting with Partners  
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1. (U) On the afternoon of May 27, Government of Niger (GON) MOF Lamine Zeine's office contacted donor partners to request their representation at a meeting the minister had decided to hold at 17h00. A U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) employee represented Embassy Niamey; three Missions sent Ambassadors to the meeting (France, Germany and the European Union (EU)).

2. (U) The first 45 minutes of the meeting recapped the GON status with regard to the EU and World Bank-funded PEMFAR (Public Expenditure Management Financial Review) program designed to reform the way the MOF manages the national budget. For the remainder of the meeting, the MOF inquired about the participants' views on the current political situation. Asserting that he was not one to talk politics, he asked whether anyone seated at the table was troubled by recent political events. No one volunteered an opinion; consequently, the Minister directly asked the French Ambassador to say something.

3. (SBU) The French Ambassador replied that the instant venue was neither the time nor the place to discuss the political matters, but added that the GON needs to find the "good formula." The only other persons to speak were the Swiss Cooperation and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) representatives. They asked where funding would come from for the new parliamentary elections that, according to the Nigerien Constitution, must be held within a 45-90 day window, as a result of President Tandja's dissolution of the National Assembly on May 26. Minister Zeine replied that funding for elections has been budgeted and that the GON would cover the costs, although the GON would welcome donor funding too.

4. (SBU) The Minister made reference to an internal GON cabinet meeting earlier in the day, then said there should be no concerns because all this was part of the political game and, while Niger democracy was not perfect, it was healthy with free and open debate. He said he did not see any risk to Niger's stability, making a number of references to Niger's turbulent political past, including involvement of the Niger military. He asked for help to avoid such things happening again, singling out help from the United States in 1999 to discourage two neighboring countries from interfering in Niger's electoral process. He stressed that part of Niger's people are for constitutional change and another part are against change. The Minister asked for advice on what Niger should do to allow the people to decide what should be done, emphasizing that it should be the people, not journalists and special interest groups to decide. He claimed that discussions were ongoing with all political parties and alleged the parties' leaders are now saying that if they had

been consulted previously about a referendum they probably would have agreed to it. He insisted the President had not even mentioned a referendum to his own political party, Mouvement National pour la Societe de Developpement - Nassara (MNSD-Nassara) until last weekend.

¶5. (SBU) The Minister closed the meeting with a request for help to prevent violence and preserve peace in Niger. He said he would keep us informed, noting that political analysis was not his expertise.

#### Donors' Monthly Breakfast

¶6. (U) At this May 27 meeting, no Embassy or international organization reported any plans to communicate with the GON about the possible consequences of ignoring the Constitutional Court's May 25 opinion on the illegality of a referendum and the dissolution of the National Assembly. Questions concerning the status of the current Prime Minister's tenure are increasingly a subject of discussion.

¶7. (SBU) Attendees had little to say about the current political situation. An EU representative stated that the lead EU country (the Czech Republic) would be the one to make any statement, while another participant opined that the EU parliament might be the body to issue a statement at some point. A UNDP representative said that the UN is coordinating with the Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS) to see what might be done, that ECOWAS is trying to be proactive and work to prevent conflict/crisis. The UNDP representative remarked that the GON has been operating on the

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"margins of legality" for the time being, and mentioned having received a letter from a collective of local non-governmental organizations addressed to the UN Secretary General with a request that he take action to prevent a crisis in Niger. Overall, participants indicated there has been insufficient time to digest, report on, and get feedback from their respective headquarters on recent events. A Belgium representative remarked that nothing illegal had been done yet. Others noted concerns that what had been done could cause instability and some negative consequences for assistance efforts. There also appeared to be consensus that if President Tandja forges ahead with a referendum, that such action would introduce an "illegal" process that merited questioning.

¶8. (U) Minimize considered.

ALLEN